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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [CY](#)
SUBJECT: CYPRIOT MARONITE COMMUNITY BETWEEN A ROCK AND HARD
PLACE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR RONALD L. SCHLICHER FOR REASONS 1.4 (B) AND (D)

11. (C) Summary: Maronite parliamentary representative Antonis Hadji Roussos told Polchief that Maronites in north Cyprus still suffered violations of freedom of movement, religion and property ownership. At the same time, Maronites living in the ROC did not seek recourse from Turkish Cypriot authorities because of the likely backlash from Greek Cypriots over their seeking preferential treatment from "the occupiers." Haji Roussos hoped that the United States could use its influence with Turkey and the Turkish military to press for greater flexibility on issues ranging from access to churches, permission for Maronites living in the south to develop their properties in the north, and the return of an important icon allegedly stolen from a Maronite church. Polchief underscored our interest in promoting freedom of movement and freedom of worship for the Maronite community, but stressed that the full range of Maronite concerns could only be addressed through a comprehensive solution to the Cyprus problem. In the meantime, we suggested, it might be useful for the Maronite religious minority to appoint a committee to serve as a liaison to authorities in the north. Hadji Roussos agreed to consider this approach. End summary.

12. (C) Polchief visited Maronite parliamentary representative Antonis Hadji Roussos and a cross-section of the Maronite religious minority's leadership to discuss recent developments with respect to Maronite issues in the north. (Note: The Maronites are not a "community" in the Cyprus sense of the word. There are only two communities on Cyprus -- Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot. The Maronites are one of three officially recognized religious minorities, together with the Armenians and the Latins -- formally affiliated with the Greek Cypriot community.) Hadji Roussos's colleagues, including representatives from each of the four Maronite villages in the north, outlined problems including: continued difficulty for enclaved Maronites attempting to return home after visiting relatives in the south, the lack of access to important churches in areas under the direct control of the Turkish military, the return of houses currently occupied by the Turkish military, and the issue of Maronite land that has been registered in the names of Turkish Cypriots or is being cultivated by Turkish settlers. In addition, Maronites living in the north had reportedly seen an important missing icon -- the icon of Ayia Marina -- hanging in a house that the Turkish military was using as a kind of unofficial museum.

13. (C) Hadji Roussos hoped that the United States would use its influence with the Turkish Cypriots, the Turkish government and the Turkish military to address the specific concerns of the Maronites. Polchief expressed our compassion and sympathy for the difficulties the Maronites faced in exercising freedom of worship and freedom of movement. We

dealt with these issues in considerable detail in both the annual Human Rights Report and the Religious Freedom Report. It was clear, however, that the only way to address the full range of Maronite concerns was through a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue. In the meantime, we would continue to make the point in our conversations with the Turkish Cypriot leadership about the importance of reaching out to the Maronites as a key pro-solution constituency in the south and the need to accommodate reasonable requests for access to religious sites and the use of Maronite properties.

We could not, however, serve as the primary interface between the Maronite leadership and the Turkish Cypriot authorities. Polchief suggested that the Maronite minority establish a standing committee of some kind to engage directly with authorities in the north -- including, if necessary, the Turkish military -- on a more regular and systematic basis. Hadji Roussos agreed that this was a sensible idea and expressed his willingness to explore it further within the Maronite minority.

14. (C) COMMENT: The Maronite minority has strong ties to a particular network of villages in the north that includes about 150 mostly elderly enclaved residents. The Turkish Cypriot leadership has repeatedly reaffirmed to us its interest in helping the Maronites improve their access to

private property and religious sites. Some of the churches in question, however, are located either within or close to Turkish military facilities. Military authorities have demonstrated little interest in accommodating Maronite concerns. We will continue to raise these issues in our contacts in the north, but with little expectation of any immediate breakthrough.

SCHLICHER